

Palm Sunday

Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Sunday Readings

March 20, 2016

11:30 St. Augustine

What a special day today is! Even though it doesn't feel like it, today is the first day of Spring (which for me is the *best* day of the year)---a day that gives us reason to rejoice at the end of winter's harsh temperatures and weather, and that helps us all to look forward to the beauty of nature all around us coming back to life.

In addition, of course, today is Palm Sunday and the beginning of the most special---the most holy---week of the year! One of the great parts of Palm Sunday is that we have our Palm branches blessed which we get to take and display prominently in our homes throughout this coming year. Even though it was too cold for us to have the blessing and the procession outdoors, I think one of the most powerful parts of Palm Sunday is the liturgical re-enactment of Jesus' joyful entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of the week----with the crowds shouting and singing "*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna!*" People were waving their palm branches and strewing them on the ground for Jesus to be able to walk on---as though He was a King----a conquering hero.

That too is the powerful aspect of Palm Sunday----it begins with festivity, and it ends in tragedy.

So these palm branches that we're given today---that we'll take home with us to display----are reminders for *all* of us of the fickleness of human nature----our own fickleness and sinfulness.

Whether it's palm branches as we heard in today's Gospel, or whatever the current "palm branch" is, from "terrible towels" or other rally flags we use to cheer on our sports teams, or placards we wave at political rallies, we use them to praise and cheer for our king---our team----our candidate----our current fad. But...when something goes wrong----when the team goes on a losing streak---when the candidate lends his support for something we don't like----when the King is accused of being a blasphemer----well, the palm branches, rally flags, placards become discarded and we walk away. Fans become critics; advocates become adversaries; supporters become enemies. The very definition of "fair-weather" fans.

Five weeks ago on Ash Wednesday, we all came to church, along with millions of other people around the world, to have ashes placed on our foreheads in the form of a Cross, and we were urged to “Turn away from Sin and be **faithful** to the Gospel” **Faithful**-----consistent----true-----not “yes” one day and “no” the next; not “here when it’s convenient for me” and “gone when I’m busy”; not saying “Hosanna to Jesus” one time and “Crucify Him” the next.

You know where those ashes come from, don’t you? They come from these palm branches. The ashes that are placed on our heads on Ash Wednesday come from the ashes of burned up palm. In effect, when people throw their palms down on the ground and walk away from Jesus, literally or by sinning, the Church symbolically goes through, picks up the palms, burns them, and then *reminds* us on Ash Wednesday: Turn away from sin and be faith-ful----faith-filled---to the Gospel----to Jesus---to your faith. Be not “fair-weather fans”.

This is the first day of the most special Week of the Year----Holy Week. We follow Jesus throughout this week as He has a “head-on” collision with the cosmic reality of sin and evil. All the evils of the history of the world----past, present and future----come down to a particular battle between good and evil----**choices** between virtue and sin-----**our own choices** between right and wrong.

It began with the original battle in the Garden of Eden----with our first parents---when sin *originally* entered the world. That battle, and those choices, have continued ever since into our own day and time.

What this “*Holy*” Week is all about is how Jesus-----once and for all----is the Victor of that primordial battle. We walk with Him throughout this week and rejoice in the fact that He has won the victory over sin and death.

Today’s Scripture Readings----and the events that we will celebrate on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday-----recount those specific moments. All of God’s Word can be summed up in one word: **Love!** Most especially, the beautiful, long Gospel today--the Passion of Jesus Christ---is the greatest story of **love** to ever be lived! It’s all about God’s **love**----compassion-----mercy!

This week is so important---so *holy*---not *just* because of those things that happened long ago, but because of what that means for us today---for each of us. That’s why our faith is so important. That’s why our membership in the Church is so important. We are members of the Body of Christ-----we *are* the Body of Christ.

So, what about us, as we go through our daily struggles, as we make our daily choices, as we live our faith each day? The “battle” that Jesus went through, and over which He was victorious, continues today in each of our lives between good and evil, virtue and sin, right and wrong.

For what---for *whom*---will we wave our palm branches? To whom will we claim our allegiance, in good times and in bad? Will we wave our palm branches no matter what, or will we be fair-weather fans/followers of Jesus?

May Holy Week renew our allegiance, strengthen our discipleship, and help us to proclaim our membership in the Body of Christ no matter what.

God bless you, now and always!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+ Bishop Paul J. Bradley